Albert Amshay Interview
July 22, 2002
Local 653 Union Hall
Pontiac, Michigan
Transcribed by Marie O'Brien
Copyedited by Daniel Clark

DC: My questions start out pretty simple. Where were you born?

AA: I was born in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

DC: Oh, Wilkes-Barre, OK. That's over on the eastern side of the state, isn't it?

AA: That was the coal mining region.

DC: Yeah. When was that? When were you born?

AA: 1916.

DC: 1916, my goodness. You've seen a lot.

AA: Beg your pardon?

DC: I think you've seen a lot in your time.

AA: Yeah. Oh yeah.

DC: Were your parents from Wilkes-Barre, as well?

AA: Well, they were from Lithuania. But they came in, oh let's see—my Dad came in 1900 and then my Mother came in about 1902. And she resided in Philadelphia. Then my Dad married her and he liked to work in the coal mine, so that's where we were raised.

DC: Where did they meet?

AA: I don't know. Through friends and all of that. I think it was in Philadelphia.

DC: What did their families do back in Lithuania?

AA: Well, my Dad, he left when he was sixteen years of age. And my Mother, she left, I imagine—a friend of hers got her over. A Guokas family, from Philadelphia, sponsored her.

DC: Sponsored her, OK.

AA: See, the Guokas family, they were related to that—the great basketball players in Philadelphia. They played with Saint Joseph. All-American. [referring to Matt Guokas Sr. and Matt Guokas Jr.]

DC: OK. So when your father came over, did he go to Philadelphia or did he go to Wilkes-Barre, or where did he go?

AA: Well, they came to Ellis Island. And then they—he came to Wilkes-Barre first. Then my Mother, let's see. My mother worked—wait until I get this thing straight.

DC: That's OK. Take your time.

AA: [pauses] Yeah, my mother worked in Philadelphia. She worked for Childs Restaurant. And my Dad, somehow he got to go to Philadelphia for a visit to see his friend and all that. And that's how they met. And it wasn't too long, they were married, I guess.

DC: OK. What do you remember about growing up in Wilkes-Barre?

AA: Growing in Wilkes-Barre? It was—it was a good neighborhood. Doors were open. You could go visit anybody you wanted. You go in their door and the doors were open. And it was friendly. It was all different ethnics. There was the Russians, the Lithuanians, the Polish, the Irish—all nationalities.

DC: Were there all nationalities all over the neighborhood or were they congregated in certain areas?

AA: No, they were all over the neighborhood and all that.

DC: OK. Did your—let's see, what kind of house did you live in? What kind of house was it?

AA: Well we, my Dad and Mom, they bought a duplex. I forget what they—I think they paid two thousand dollars for it. And that was a big home and all at that time. And so they remodeled it. Then they had the running water; they got the toilets and all that in. So when they bought it, it was, like, bare and all. But somehow it was a well-built home.

DC: How long did it take them to put in the running water and the toilets?

AA: I think that was before I was born. [chuckles]

DC: Before you were born, OK. Uh huh. All right.

AA: But that's what my Dad used to tell me—because at that time they used to have the outhouses.

DC: Were there still outhouses in the neighborhood when you were growing up?

AA: No, they were gone then. They were all gone. Only out in the country, I guess, is where the outhouses were. And my Dad and all, he had a—he rented a yard, a field behind the house and all that. He raised a cow there and he raised chickens and ducks and rabbits and all that.

DC: Did you have a garden, as well?

AA: Oh yeah. We had a garden. And there was no *pesticides* at that time.

DC: Did you help in the garden and with the livestock?

AA: Oh yeah. My brother and I—I have a twin brother and all that—and when the calf was born, we went down with a wheelbarrow. We picked the calf up and brought him back up to the barn, and that was it.

DC: So what other kinds of chores did you have around the house?

AA: Oh, the—well, I used to dig the garden. My brother and I would dig the garden. Take care of the chickens and ducks and all that. We used to go down to the brewery to get the mash and all that for the ducks. When it was ninety degree weather, the ducks would be staggering around the yard.

DC: [laughing] Having a little beer buzz huh?

AA: Yeah. But then, and you got a hundred pound bag, it was only costing ten cents at that time from the brewery. And sometimes, whoever was working down there that we knew, we'd get it for free. Otherwise, it was ten cents.

DC: Did most of the people in your neighborhood have gardens and livestock?

AA: Yeah—no, most of them had, like, gardens and that, like they raised chickens and ducks, and rabbits and all that. But I think our family was the only one that had the cow and all that.

DC: Was it a milk cow?

AA: Yeah, it was a milk cow. And we had it for a few years, then we got rid of it. My Dad, I don't know if we killed it or got rid of it. I don't know what happened to the cow.

DC: OK. Did your Dad talk to you much about work in the coal mines?

AA: No. The only thing he used to say, he said it was hard work. And I know when I was young and all that, I'd get up in the morning when he was ready to go to work. I looked and he was eating steak, pork chops, and anything before he went to work, for breakfast. Because he worked hard and all that. So when he came home from work and all that, he was tired.

DC: What was your mother doing in those years?

AA: Well, she was a regular mother, taking care of the house and all that, and the children.

DC: OK. Did you have other siblings besides your twin brother?

AA: Yeah, I had a younger brother, Frank. Well he passed away. And I had a sister, and she's dead. And I have another sister. She died in—well, I guess she was only about three or four months old. She died of pneumonia. But otherwise, my brother and I are the only ones living now.

DC: Where does your brother live?

AA: He lives up the street, about three streets over.

DC: Oh, he's here, too. OK. All right.

AA: Yeah. Because he just had a heart attack, and he had four bypasses.

DC: He did?

AA: Yeah. So I go up there every morning now, to give him a shower and all that. He can get in the shower himself, but I have to wash his back and see that he gets in all right. But otherwise, we get along swell.

DC: OK. Let's see—what about school? Was there a school?

AA: Yeah, there was a school. I went to the grade school there. It was just about two blocks, no, three blocks from where I lived. We used to walk to school. And that was the grade school. Then we went to junior high. That was, oh, about two miles away. But we used to walk it. At that time, walked it. The only time we got to ride the streetcar, was when it was raining, we had tickets, and took the—it was a long ride going to school. Then going to high school, it was just in our back yard. Yeah, just about, oh, a block and a half away, the high school was.

DC: So did you graduate high school?

AA: Yeah, I graduated. The whole family graduated. My Dad believed in education. He was self—he knew how to—he talked eight different languages.

DC: Is that right?

AA: And after all—and he would, he wouldn't want to talk to us in Lithuanian. He said, "We're in America, we talk English." My Mother talked Lithuanian, that's all. That's the only thing she knew. But now, later on, she accomplished the English language.

DC: OK. But it sounds like your father, especially, pushed education.

AA: Yes, he did. And my younger brother, he was a great football player and all. So he had a scholarship to go on down to Bucknell University. And after the season was over, and it was during the Depression, and my Dad couldn't afford—he had to raise five children and all that. You couldn't afford it. So he had to drop out. Then later on Wally Butts from Georgia [coached the University of Georgia football team from 1939-1960] called him up, asked him to come down for a tryout. So he went down for a tryout and there was sixty candidates out for one position, tackle. So he didn't have any—well, they paid his way and all that, going down. But coming back he wanted to save some money, so he's hitchhiking. So they threw him in jail. Just overnight, that's all. Otherwise he was all right. Like I said, he was a—like you'd say—what would you say years ago? That you'd—all the colleges, they'd offer him all kinds of scholarships. Even the University of Scranton offered him a scholarship. And, like Wally Butts and Jones and all the coaches at the—at Scranton, they'd come down to the house, talk to my parents. And my Dad would understand. He said, "Well, he's a good athlete," and all that. "Let him go to college." So he had about two years of college.

DC: Did many people in your neighborhood go on to college?

AA: Oh yeah, there's quite a bit of it—after the war and all that, because they got the—the bill of rights, or whatever they called it. [the GI Bill]

DC: How about in the Depression years?

AA: Depression years? The only ones I knew in Depression was, in the neighborhood, there was—a lot of them that played football got scholarships to Pittsburgh and Penn State, and some of the—like Lafayette and Lehigh and all that—the smaller colleges.

DC: Was football a big thing in Wilkes-Barre?

AA: Oh yeah. It was great. Baseball was great, too. And basketball was pretty good, too.

DC: Did you play any of those sports?

AA: I played baseball. You know, then after I went in the service, after I came out of the service, this one scout from Cleveland wanted me to go down to Batavia [New York] to play with the Cleveland farm system. But I haven't played in five years and I was thirty-some years old. I was washed up. So that was it. But I played against a lot of good ball players. Pete Gray, the one-armed—I played against him. Adam Comorosky played with the Pirates, and Davis [probably John Davis, born in Wilkes-Barre in 1915, who broke into the major leagues with the New York Giants in 1941], they played with the Giants and all that. There was a lot of them that got away.

DC: Were they from Wilkes-Barre?

AA: Yeah, they were in Wilkes-Barre area.

DC: OK. So you played against them. OK. Let's see. Well, what was it like in Wilkes-Barre during the Depression?

AA: Well during the Depression, they managed. In fact, my Dad, he worked in all the mines and all that, but somehow we had food to eat and we raised, like the chickens and rabbits and all that. And we had—it was good and—ate a lot of soup. My Mother used to make a lot of soup and all that. And it was good—and after all, some of these hoboes would come around and my Mother always said, "There's always room for someone at the table." And a couple times, a couple of hobos came from Indiana and they stopped to [?] ticket and all that. So they stop in, my Dad and Mother'd invite them to eat, have something to eat. And they thanked us and all that. And after I read that [fumbles for Studs] Terkel, author about Depression—and after I read that book I said, "Jesus, if it doesn't remind me of my time as a youngster."

DC: Is that right? Can you remember anything in particular from that book that reminded you of your time growing up?

AA: Oh yeah. He wrote about the Depression, about the hoboes. They'd go around to certain towns and they'd go try to get a meal and all that. And like I said, it was interesting, that book and all. I've read it so many years ago, I can't cope with all of it now.

DC: Sure. Did you have any jobs other than working in the garden and working with the chickens and all that?

AA: Well after I graduated from high school, I worked at the mines for five years. And then my—my Dad, he died. He worked the mines. Died from miner's asthma and pneumonia. At that time, there was no cure for it. So after he passed away, I quit. I went down to New Jersey to work.

DC: So when did your father pass away?

AA: In 1940.

DC: OK, 1940. Well tell me about your job in the coal mines. What was that like?

AA: Well, I worked, the only thing—when I worked below—I only worked below about a month. Not till later on—I got a job up above and all. I asked for a job above, they gave me a job. So I got to be an inspector of the coal. And that was—the pay wasn't that hot, but I was—see that, the gondolas where they load them up, and I have to go take some coal out of there and put it in this acid thing, to check the coal—what it was, see how much rock was in it and how much was coal and all that. But that was it. And I used to walk to work. It'd be about a mile and a half to walk to work.

DC: Were there different mines around Wilkes-Barre?

AA: Oh, there's quite a bit of them. There was, let's see, the one I worked was in south Wilkes-Barre. Not too far, about, oh, a quarter mile there was a Buttonwood colliery. And after that there was twenty-one, and across the river in Plymouth, there was a couple over there. Mines and all that, breakers and all that. But, like I said, it was all coal mines at that time.

DC: Were they owned by different companies?

AA: We didn't—wait. Glen Alden [Coal Company] owned them all at that time. And that was—[pause] yeah, they all was owned by Glen Alden. That was a big company back there at that time.

DC: When you first started in the coal mines, were you underground?

AA: Underground, yeah.

DC: What was your job down there?

AA: Well I was a—they called us a nipper. The cars would go and you'd stop the cars and you put a nip in the wheel so it'd stop the car. But otherwise—I didn't like it down below. I wanted to get out.

DC: What didn't you like about it?

AA: It was going down too deep. Twelve hundred feet down below and all that. That's quite a distance.

DC: Had your father worked below ground, too?

AA: Oh yeah. Yeah. All of them—just about all of these worked down below. Let's see which one . . . [sound of pages turning].

DC: This is the picture in the paper.

AA: Yeah. [pauses] Pete, he worked in down below aside me. And Charles. The three of them, they all worked down below.

DC: And these were your brothers-in-law, you said?

AA: They were my wife's uncles.

DC: Oh, wife's *uncles*. OK, I'm sorry—yeah, wife's uncles. Wow. And how long had they been in Wilkes-Barre?

AA: Oh, they—they left Wilkes-Barre [short pause] before the war. They came out here and

they all got jobs and they made themselves a good life out here, out working at Pontiac Motors.

DC: In this area. Yeah. OK. We'll get to that point in a second here. Did your twin brother also work in the coal mines?

AA: No. He worked in Binghamton, New York for awhile. He worked as a busboy in one of the restaurants there. And after all he worked in the Pocono Mountains as a busboy, too. And my younger brother, he worked in the—as a salad maker in one of the restaurants in the Pocono Mountains. It was a big to-do then. I forget what the name of the restaurants were out there. In Poconos—those vacationers who go there and all that. There was a lot of them.

DC: So it sounds like they stayed above ground as well.

AA: Yeah, they stayed. Yeah, my brother—then my brother came out here right after the war. He was out here a year before I came out.

DC: OK. Let's see. So did you stay in that inspector job, then, for several years?

AA: At the coal mines?

DC: At the coal mines, yeah.

AA: About two years.

DC: Two years inspecting. OK, but you said you worked there four or five years.

AA: Yeah, but somehow I worked around—before I became inspector I worked in a breaker. That's where they—the coal would run down a chute and I'd sort it and I'll take the rock out and all.

DC: OK. How would you do that? How did that work?

AA: We'd just sit down—they had a chute running down there, and I'll tell you, that was a dirty job. I wished I—I'm glad I got out of there. And just the coal—it'd be all smashed up and you'd pick out the stones in it. But otherwise, the rest of the coal was pretty good and all that.

DC: How fast would the coal go by you?

AA: It'd go by pretty fast. See, when they—they'd bring the car and then take it up, the top of the breaker. And they empty it there. And they had something that crushed it there. And they'd run it down the chutes. And there was a lot of chutes and all that. And they separated.

DC: How many breakers were there?

AA: Well, each mine had a breaker of their own. So that was it.

DC: How many were in your type of job?

AA: Oh, I would say about forty or fifty. Because they had all kinds of chutes and all that, running down. And you were here and then some below you and somebody, if you miss something, somebody below would catch the stuff and all that. And after, when I got—after I got sick and tired of it, and I said, "Ah, hell. I'm going to see if I can get outside." So they got, I got outside as an inspector. The reason why I got outside as an inspector, because I knew the head inspector out there. He lived in the neighborhood.

DC: Did most—were there a number of people who would prefer to work outside?

AA: Well, yeah, they would prefer to work outside, but there wasn't that many jobs on the outside.

DC: OK. So you were *lucky* then.

AA: Yeah, I was a little fortunate.

DC: OK. And how did the pay compare for the work outside to the work underground?

AA: Well, the job that I had underground, they paid the same—thirty-five cents an hour, at that time. That was in 1930—'35. And the pay wasn't that great at that time, but still and all, that was pretty good.

DC: Do you remember any unions in the coal mines?

AA: Oh yeah. I remember the unions well. In fact, my uncle tried to form—helped form a new union. He got blackballed from the mines, but somehow the UA—the United Mine Workers, like John L. Lewis's union and all them—everybody belonged to it. I think everybody was a union member there.

DC: So was your Dad a union member?

AA: Oh yeah, my Dad was. I was a union member, too.

DC: OK. Do you ever remember r. . .

AA: The strikes—they had the strikes and all that. I had to go on strike a couple of times. And when they went on strike and all, the State Police used to come around the neighborhood and all that to get on some of the workers, you know, like who were scabbing and all that. They'd come around and try to protect them and all that. And they *did* protect them.

DC: How about in your neighborhood—when there was a strike, were there tensions in your neighborhood?

AA: Well, the State Police were there, but not too far from the neighborhood was some of the people that went to work. We called them scabs. And they'd—they'd try to protect them and all that.

DC: What would happen when the strike was over and you had some families who scabbed and some who didn't? What would happen?

AA: Well, it seemed like they forgot. They all got together again. Because I know this one family that was scabbing and all that, and I know a couple of guys, they used dynamite and blew their porch up and all that. But otherwise, it was—it wasn't rough and all that. But somehow, like—like, my neighbor—I know she was hiding somebody. I don't know who it was and all that. State Police came and she threw a bucket of water at them. They came, and they arrested her. But otherwise, it wasn't real bad, you know. Just like all the other strikes and all that.

DC: You said your Father died of miner's asthma and pneumonia.

AA: Pneumonia, yeah.

DC: Did his health get progressively worse, do you remember?

AA: Beg your pardon?

DC: Did his health decline over the years, do you remember? Was he able to work?

AA: Well I'll tell you what. He was only ill about a little over a month. He went to the dentist and he had a tooth extracted. After that, it was his downfall. It seems like that's when he started going downhill—miner's asthma and all that. It was in the winter that he passed away, in February it was.

DC: How was your Mother's health?

AA: My Mother's health was good. She lived to be eighty-some years old. Eighty-three years old. And she died in, let's see—19—well anyhow, Ted Kennedy, Chappaquiddick happened at that time. That was, I think, '68 or something. In that area, and all that.

DC: Yeah, that's about right. [in June 1969] OK. Let's see. Now did any of these uncles—or when did your mother's uncles. . .

AA: They're my wife's uncles.

DC: Or your *wife's* uncles. I'm sorry, I keep getting confused.

AA: They all passed away.

DC: Yeah. Were any of them in Wilkes-Barre when you were growing up?

AA: Oh, they were all in Wilkes-Barre when I was growing, but they came out here before the war and all that, because they figured there was work at the auto plants and all that.

DC: So they thought that the auto plant work would be better than the mining?

AA: Yeah. Oh yeah, it'd be better than mining and all that.

DC: And what did they find when they came out here?

AA: Well, they got themselves a job and gradually they rented homes, then they bought their homes, and they settled down. And my uncle, he was out here. He worked for Ford, that five dollars a day deal. He was out here for awhile. He quit, and he said, "Heck, I'm not going to work on the line." So he quit then.

DC: So some of them didn't like it.

AA: Yeah.

DC: Were you getting letters back from these folks in Pontiac?

AA: Well, my—like my wife's parents would get letters and all that. Otherwise, how I got out here is my wife's aunt came to Wilkes-Barre. And she said, "Why don't you come out here?" In fact, I was married and I didn't have a job. And eventually, said "OK." So I went out of there. The day I arrived here, they took me over to the plant—I was hired the next day. So I worked there ever since.

DC: What day was that?

AA: February—what the heck day was it? February 8th or something. I forget.

DC: What year was it?

AA: 1948.

DC: 1948, OK. Now it sounds like you went into the service then . . .

AA: I was in the service, yeah.

DC: When did you go into the service?

AA: I went in the service in '42. March of '42. And I was stationed in Hawaii, as an observation on Koko Head [on southeastern corner of Oahu]. I was up there, oh, I guess

for five months. Then I went to Guadalcanal.

DC: Did you? So were you in the Navy?

AA: No, I was in the Army. In the infantry.

DC: OK. So were you drafted?

AA: No, I enlisted. My brother was drafted. I enlisted.

DC: OK. You chose the Army. And where was your training camp?

AA: Camp Wheeler, Georgia. And after training camp, they shipped me right over to Hawaii, after I got finished with basics.

DC: How long was, how long were you in basic training?

AA: Let's see, three months.

DC: OK. Pretty fast then you're off to Hawaii. What was it like getting out of Wilkes-Barre?

AA: Well it wasn't too bad and all that. I got outta there. Once you get out, you have to make your own friends. That's the way I always figured. Even nowadays, if some of the kids and all that, they wanna go on—I said, it's who you make friends with. If you get with a drunk or something like that, you're gonna wind up as a rummy. Otherwise . . .

DC: Did you make some friends in the service?

AA: Oh, a lot of friends and all that.

DC: Where were they from?

AA: Well lots—there was a group from Pennsylvania, some from Texas, some from Alabama. They were scattered from all over the country. And after we got to Guadalcanal, and I lost a friend over there, but still in all it was an experience that you, that you want to forget. You seen people that were shot and all that. But otherwise—because I was in demolition in the infantry. Everything—I done everything. I blew up a radio, a Japanese radio. They didn't know who blew it up and they never did find out.

DC: So how did you manage to do that?

AA: Well I used TNT blocks and all that. And then I threw a couple of grenades, but somehow the grenades is what done the trick. But the TNT blocks I blew up dead bombs and all that, you know. It was an experience that—you did and all that, then you didn't want to mess around with it after that. I was teaching—I was instructing about demolition and all that, and I had a class at that time. I had dynamite caps—this one fellow from Texas, I

didn't know he had it. And after all he's going home, going back to camp and all that. And he blew, the caps went off and he blew off three fingers. So that's—I had to check everything close after that. And then after all we went to—after Guadalcanal, we went to New Georgia [in the Solomon Islands], and from there I went to New Zealand for a rest and all that. While I was there, I was in the hospital almost all the time—pneumonia, and I had malaria at that time.

DC: Now was the war still going on at that time?

AA: Oh yeah. That was '43—yeah, '43. Then I went and I had my picture taken—this is a funny—my picture taken at a studio down there. And the studio fellow said, "You were here." My brother was there before me! So he made a picture of both of us together, you know. And that was interesting. I never thought I'd do that. And after awhile I bumped into my brother and we went back to Guadalcanal after that for a little training. And my brother—they were there—they came. And that's where I met him, in Guadalcanal.

DC: You saw him in Guadalcanal.

AA: Yeah. Then after a while I seen him in the Philippines and all that. So, but—I guess it's an experience, but I don't—I don't want go through it again. I mean, you did your duty and that was it.

DC: So it sounds like you were right in the thick of things.

AA: Well, most of the times. Well, it wasn't that bad. After I see these movies and all that, I said, "Well, they blow them out of proportion."

DC: Do they?

AA: Yeah.

DC: How so?

AA: Saving John Ryan and all that, and after all that Red—now what was it?

DC: Red Line? Thin Red Line?

AA: Yeah. I've seen that. And they blew that out of proportion.

DC: How so? What's out of proportion?

AA: Oh everything was all big flashes. There wasn't that many flashes and all that. You had rifle shots and hand grenades, and they didn't make that big of a splash or anything. And the shells and all that, they didn't make that big flash. But they had to blow it out of proportion. Which makes it—like the movies—I guess they do blow things out of proportion to let the people know that—like a flash or something. But there isn't that big of

a flash.

DC: So how did you end up in detonation?

AA: See, the first time, like from Guadalcanal we went to New Georgia. I went by a—we got on a destroyer and they took us over to New Georgia. So we landed over there and it was all right. Then we had to go through the swamps and all that. But I don't know. And after awhile, my brother and them, they came over later on. They were landing and he said, "How in the heck did you guys get through that swamp?" I said, "Well, what the heck, you have to go through there." But it was . . .

DC: What was it like going through the swamp?

AA: It was terrible. You have to—it's only about that high but somehow you had to go through.

DC: Where did you get malaria?

AA: I had malaria on all the islands. I had it in Guadalcanal, I had it in New Georgia, I had it in the Philippines, I had it in New Zealand. It seemed like I was allergic to it. I don't know—it seemed like I always had malaria.

DC: How sick did you get?

AA: Well I ran a fever for quite awhile. Then after awhile I'd develop bronchitis and all that. But like I said, that weather wasn't that good for me. That's the only thing I got to say.

DC: So where were you when the war was over?

AA: I was in the Philippines. I was ready to go to Japan. We were getting ready to, because we were training for Japan and all that.

DC: How did you feel about that?

AA: Well, if I had to go, I had to go. But I had the points and all that, and being—I know when I was a tech sergeant there and after all they said, well, I said, "I think I better get east and all that." So I went back east. And we landed in San Francisco and they took us up to—oh, I forget the name. Some camp up there. I forget a lot. [soft chuckles]

DC: How did you learn about the atomic bombings?

AA: Let's see, where was I? I was at a film, and yeah, I heard about it. Somehow, Tokyo Rose used to tell us a lot of things and all that. And I—it was announced and all that, on the—about the atomic bomb. After it was—they dropped it and all that, they knew it was—that was it. Because we didn't get that much news in the infantry, being out in the jungles and all that. We didn't get that much news.

DC: So you said you headed back east then and went up to someplace in California?

AA: Yeah, we landed in San Francisco. We went up to Sacramento, that's where it was. And after awhile—there was a camp there. We stood there—we stood there for about three days and after all we got on a plane and went back east. And the plane that we were on, one of the motors caught on fire. And we landed in Texas, changed the motor, and away you go.

DC: All that way, and then . . .

AA: Yeah. But still, you know, a lot of people—I think it's safe in a plane, like the 47s and all—C-47s. The guy said, "Just chew gum." They can go quite a ways with one motor.

DC: Really, OK.

AA: Yeah. That's what the pilots and all that used to tell us. But they always told us, "Chew gum when you get in a plane." Because your ears will get blocked up.

DC: So where did you land after Texas? Where did you land?

AA: Then we landed at Newark Airport. And from Newark Airport, we went down to Indiantown Gap [military base near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania], where I got discharged from the service.

DC: OK. Was that right away?

AA: No. First they gave me a couple of days off and all that. And I went home. Indiantown Gap was only about eighty miles away from Wilkes-Barre, maybe a little more than that. So I got home and it was around midnight. After that, I don't know. And then I went back with this friend of mine. His mother loaned him a car to go back to get discharged, so we got discharged then. October, in October—23rd, or something like that.

DC: So what did you do then, when you were discharged from the service?

AA: Well, tell you the truth, I didn't do anything. I didn't look for a job or anything because we were getting that twenty dollars a month. I don't know. I forget what it was.

DC: Yeah, for fifty-two weeks or whatever?

AA: Yeah. In fact, I didn't—I didn't do anything. Then I—then I was working with a carpenter doing rough carpenter work and all that. And the wood was green. You'd hit it and the juice would come right at you. That was—I worked with that for about a year.

DC: Was that in Wilkes-Barre?

AA: Yeah, that was in Wilkes-Barre.

DC: Were you living at your mother's home then?

AA: Yeah, I was living with my Mother, and my sister and all that.

DC: How did your Mother get by after your Father died?

AA: She managed. Well, she got Social Security—so much, I forget what it was. It wasn't much at all. But my sister was there, and she worked in the silk mills and all. Then she worked in the A&P and all that. Then after awhile—what the heck? I'm trying to think now . . .

DC: Well you said you did the rough carpentry work.

AA: Yeah, I did rough carpentry work.

DC: OK. What was it like being back in Wilkes-Barre after having been in Guadalcanal and the Philippines and all that?

AA: It felt good. You got to see all your friends and all that. On that street, there was eighty of us went to the service. And they all came back except one. My wife's uncle, he was stabbed in Oklahoma.

DC: In Oklahoma?

AA: Yeah, he was at camp, at Fort Sill, I think it was. He was stabbed there. Some Mexican stabbed him there. He was the only one we lost.

DC: Wow. But not in combat.

AA: Not in combat.

DC: Was there any kind of party or celebration in Wilkes-Barre for all the veterans who came back?

AA: I don't know. They all came back at all different times and all that. They were scattered. Some came back, oh, four or five months before I got back there. And some—a lot of them came back on the point system and all that.

DC: Yeah. So let's see, you would've been, what, near, approaching thirty years old at that point in time, right?

AA: Yeah.

DC: OK. So how long did you do the carpentry work?

AA: Yeah, I did it for about a year. Then after that I got married. I didn't have a job. The carpenter laid me off and all that. Soon after, my wife's aunt, she came in to visit her mother and one of the Slobinskis [sp?], that was—went to visit her mother and all that. And she said, "Why don't you come out here?" So we went down to New York and got on a train and came out here.

DC: And that's when you got hired the next day.

AA: Yeah.

DC: OK.

AA: In fact, after I got off the train, I went in—they took me up to the plant and I—they hired me and then they'd start work the next day. So that was it. That work was—I worked, what was it? Oh, I worked that nickel plate for almost a year.

DC: Was that your first job, at nickel plate?

AA: Yeah. I worked there about a year.

DC: What exactly did you do in nickel plate?

AA: I was buffing bumpers. That was a lousy job.

DC: What made it lousy?

AA: Well, it was so clumsy and all, the work was—and they had the wheel and all that.

DC: The wheel to buff?

AA: Yeah, to buff the wheel. Because you had to buff the chrome that was burnt with the white burned chrome on there. You had to buff that out to bring the gloss. So I worked there about a year. Then they laid me off and I got home. Next day I got a call to come to—they hired me in. So I got hired in as an inspector in Plant 8.

DC: As an inspector?

AA: Yeah. I was there ever since.

DC: Is that right?

AA: Yeah.

DC: Now how did you manage to get the inspector job?

AA: I don't know. That was the opening. See, it was in Plant 8 and that's—either that or else I

was gonna go down to proving ground, but I didn't have a car at that time, so I figured I might as well take the inspection job. That was nearby. And that was just, oh, about two and a half blocks from where I lived. Maybe three blocks at the most. So I used to walk to work.

DC: So you would've had very little seniority to get an inspector job, right?

AA: Right, because that's what they took me in on. I don't know why I got it. Maybe because I was on inspection at the coal mines. I don't know.

DC: Who knows? What did they make in Plant 8?

AA: Well, they assembled the cars.

DC: That's the assembly, OK. So what exactly did you inspect?

AA: All the repair work that used to—we used to have, let's see, one, two, three, four—three lines. We had an inspector on each line. They had a couple inspect that. They had inspectors in the pit and all that. So I was on the top. So I had final body inspection and all that. And it was a good job. And I mean, at times, you know, you were busy and at times you weren't that busy. You look at the repair ticket and all that. It wasn't much of a write up, so you just check whatever. But if you found something wrong, you just wrote it up and had them repair it.

DC: Would they repair it right on the line or would they take it off to a different area?

AA: Oh, they'd take it—they'd run them off the line and run them in the back of the plant and bring them back in later on—when they had, working overtime.

DC: Let's go back to the buffing job briefly, because we went over that pretty fast. Let's see. What was it like your first day working into nickel plate? You'd been in the coal mine, you'd been an inspector. What was it like? How did that compare when you went into the plant?

AA: Well, the only thing, they trained me how to buff, to use the wheel and all. They trained me how to buff and all that. And it wasn't too—in fact, I buffed the bumpers and other parts that were nickel-plated and all that. But mostly the bumpers. I had to buff the bumpers.

DC: Was the buffing wheel loud?

AA: No, it wasn't loud. But I mean, it was—[pause] can't remember. And my brother, he was a solution attendant over there. And he worked there all his—the whole thirty years there.

DC: What did a solution attendant do?

AA: Well he checked the chrome tanks and all that. And they had to check the chrome and all

that, the fluid that was in the tanks. And he used to go around checking. In fact he's—well, after all, they'd check to see how strong the acid was in the—it was all acid around the acid zone.

DC: When did he start working in that room?

AA: Well he worked in—let's see, he was out there in 1946. He came out here in '46.

DC: He was there before you. Did he like that job?

AA: Yeah, he didn't mind it. But like I said, it was no work. The only thing was, a lot of it was observation and checking for leaks and all that, for the tanks and all that. And if there's a rack or something fell in, he'd have to help get it out and all that. They had a way of getting it out. I don't know.

DC: Oh, a rack that was dipping in there?

AA: Yeah. But that was it. He—but still and all, he worked all the time around that acid. I thought maybe he'd have cancer or something like that from the acid. No, but he's still going. He had four bypasses lately.

DC: Well who were your fellow workers in the buffing job? I mean, who all did you work with?

AA: Well I just bumped into one of the fellows the other day. A guy by the name of Esko [sp?], he worked on another machine.

DC: Where were they from, these workers that were . . .

AA: Well that Esko, he was from the South. I think he was from Kentucky or something.

DC: Uh huh.

AA: See . . .

**End of Tape I, Side A,**

**Begin Tape I, Side B**

DC: . . . from Kentucky, you think?

AA: Yeah. I popped in on him the other day.

DC: How is he doing?

AA: He's doing good. He said, "the only thing I'm getting old and parts are going to heck."

DC: Yeah. Need that repair shop. Well maybe I can talk to him someday. I'd enjoy that. So anyways, there were people from all over different states?

AA: Oh yeah. They were from different states.

DC: Had many of them been there a long time when you got there?

AA: Oh yeah. Some were there a long time. I know this one fellow, George, he was from Oklahoma. He was a supervisor. And there was a couple of supervisors, they were from Michigan. But I—like the superintendent and all that, I think they were all from Michigan. They were born here and all that. In fact, they were graduates of Michigan and Michigan State and all. They had good jobs.

DC: Well, how did you get along with these supervisors?

AA: We got along pretty good. They'd make you do your job and all that, and they wouldn't bother you.

DC: OK. This is in the buffing room we're talking about?

AA: No, on inspection. In the buffing room they wouldn't bother—they wouldn't bother you at all there. They were pretty good there.

DC: Were you able to keep up with the work OK in the buffing room?

AA: Well yeah, but there wasn't that much—there'd be a line going with the bumpers on it. You see, you take one off and buff another one. And somebody else would have a jack down below, they'd buff and all that. Each one—everybody had a different—I forget, there was quite a bit of buffers there.

DC: OK. And which plant was the buffing room in?

AA: Nickel plate. It was the nickel plate.

DC: Nickel plate. All right. There we go. So you got the inspector job. Let's see, you got laid off. And how long were you laid off before you got the inspector job?

AA: One day.

DC: Just one day, OK. That's not very long.

AA: No, because they called me up the next day and they gave me a choice—either go out to the proving grounds or go to Plant 8. So I took the inspecting job.

DC: Because you didn't have a car to get out to the proving grounds anyway.

AA: That's right.

DC: Would you have wanted that job if you could have gotten it, at the proving grounds?

AA: Oh yeah, I think that would've been interesting. Because the only thing you do is test cars out there. That—that would've been a lot better. But at that time I didn't have a car.

DC: Did anybody in your extended family have a car, any of your . . .

AA: Oh yeah, they all had cars and all. Let's see—let's see, one, two, three of them had cars that—see the oldest one here? They didn't have cars but their children drove cars for them and helped, got them around. In fact, I used to—my wife and I used to take some of them out.

DC: What was your wife doing at this time, when you first got to Pontiac? How did she feel about coming to Pontiac?

AA: Oh she felt pretty good about it. Because we worked and after all we found—then she worked over in General Motors, over at Truck and Coach.

DC: Truck and Coach, OK.

AA: Yeah, she worked over there for about five years. Then she got pregnant and I told her, "Jack it up." After the baby was born, I told her, "Jack it up." So she—then after awhile, later on, she worked in the school system as a manager of the cafeteria. She worked as a cook first, then she became a manager.

DC: What was she doing when you first met her?

AA: She worked—when I first met her? I knew her just—we were kids and all that. We were living only about five houses away from one another.

DC: OK. So you'd known her for a long time.

AA: Oh yeah, I'd known her. I used to kid her all the time.

DC: Well what about when you got married. What was she doing at that point?

AA: Oh she was working in a sewing factory, clothing factory, making jackets, Army jackets and—yeah, she was making the Eisenhower jackets when the war was on. And that was—I forget what else she was doing She worked in that same plant, that sewing plant.

DC: Was it in Wilkes-Barre?

AA: Yeah, it was in Wilkes-Barre. Because there was a lot of them sewing plants at that time there.

DC: Is that where a lot of the women worked?

AA: Oh, a lot of them worked in the stores, like as clerks and salespersons and all that. But there was a lot of them that worked in the silk—they had silk mills there. People worked in the silk mills. And the dress factories. And what else? And other factories around there.

DC: But when she came to Pontiac, you said that she got a job . . .

AA: Well she didn't work for about a year. Then after all she got the job over at Truck and Coach.

DC: And what was her job at Truck and Coach?

AA: She was a—she worked in the office. That's all I know. To tell you the truth, I never questioned. I know she worked there. She worked in the office, as a clerk, maybe a filing clerk or something. I can't remember now. I should have brought her over.

DC: I guess so. I could talk to her about it. We could ask her—that might be worthwhile. Anyways, let's see—did you have any interactions with the union in those first years here in Pontiac?

AA: I got along with the unions all the time, because I believe in unions. Because I think they give a worker a little protection.

DC: So when you first got your job here in Pontiac at nickel plate, did you join the union right away?

AA: No, I didn't join the union. When I—*yeah*, I belonged to the union at the time. Because they asked me if I wanted to belong to the union, and I said, "Yeah." In the coal mines—I belonged to the union in the coal mines, so I believe in unions.

DC: So you joined the union when you first got here.

AA: Yeah. I forget what paycheck it was. Anyhow I signed up. They asked me if I want to belong to it. And I said yeah.

DC: Do you remember on your—you know, thinking back to your first job with the buffing and all—did you ever have any reason to *use* the union when you had that buffing job? Did you ever need your committeeman or anything?

AA: No. In fact, the only—only once I called a committeeman. That was in, in Plant 8. Because, I don't know, there was too much exhaust and all that in one area, they called it. That's the only time.

DC: And do you have any idea when that was?

AA: I'll say, in the '60s, I would say. Because—because they'd start the motor up and the exhaust, you know, from the cars and all that. We called that—called up on it—and they straightened it out.

DC: OK. But that's the only time in your whole work career that you ended up . . .

AA: Yeah. I had no reason to go call the union. But I mean, they—that's one thing about a union—they give you protection. And like, a lot of the union members—in fact—[pause] oh, I can't think of their name. Because I got along good with them. They were my represent—what the heck were they? I can't think what the heck they were. Oh, committeemen, that's what they were. Committeemen. I got along and that. They asked me anything and I didn't complain. Well I didn't have nothing to complain of because my job wasn't that bad and all that. But the only time we called him was when the motors was running and all the exhaust and all that would get you. But otherwise, working conditions, I never had to call the committeemen. Because you did your job and nobody got on you or anything like that.

DC: Let's see now. I'm trying to stay back there in the '50s as much as possible—late '40s and the early '50s. When exactly was your first child born?

AA: 1954.

DC: '54, OK. So your wife did work several years there at Truck and Coach.

AA: Yeah.

DC: OK. Yeah. What was life like then, those first five years here in Pontiac? You didn't have any kids, you both were working—what was life like for you and your wife?

AA: Well we'd go downtown and go shopping. For five, ten dollars you get enough groceries and all that. And then after all I got a—bought myself a car in 1950. I bought myself a car in '50.

DC: OK. What kind of car did you get?

AA: I got a Pontiac. All General Motors cars I got. Yeah. Chevrolet, Oldsmobile. But some of them—most of them were Pontiacs. And then we'd get around, go out to Walled Lake on weekends or something like that, visiting people and all that.

DC: What shifts were you both working?

AA: Well, we both worked—I worked night shift—no, I didn't work night shift. Yes, I did. When I worked in nickel plate, I worked night shift. Then when I got in Plant 8 I worked

day shift all the time. Because I know one of the supervisors, he said, "You want to go on nights?" I said, "Nights are for sleeping. I don't want to go."

DC: How about your wife? What shift did she work?

AA: She worked days. And after all she got in the school system, she worked days all the time.

DC: So you got your shifts coordinated then.

AA: Yeah. And after—when my son was born she got in the school system, and she used to take him to school at St. Mike's. And with her going to work, and she's used to driving to school and pick him up and all that, so that was convenient. Because I didn't have far to walk to work and all that. So she had the car all the time.

DC: So anyways, before your first child was born, then, it sounds like you enjoyed going shopping, going out to the lake and stuff. What other kind of things did you do?

AA: Oh, when my son was born, I took him all over. Took him to Washington, Atlantic City, I took him all over. This side of the Mississippi, I think I had him in every state.

DC: Really?

AA: Yeah. Because we'd take a summer vacation. We'd take a trip and all that. And he loved it. In fact, we loved to go down to Gettysburg, Valley Forge, Philadelphia, and all them places, and Washington, D.C. and Atlantic City. Because when we went on our honeymoon, that's where we went, to Atlantic City. And up to New York state, down to south Florida and all that. We took him all over.

DC: Did you like to travel?

AA: Oh, he loved to travel and I loved to travel, too. When he was a baby, well they didn't have the car seats that they have now. We had like a little cradle or something like that to hook it up. He'd sleep in there. And he was a good traveler. In fact, he had a good sense of direction when he was growing up. I know he was—I think about eight, nine years—his brother, my brother came down from Binghamton. They went down to Hershey, Pennsylvania. He knew the route and all that going down there, my son. And after all, coming back he told his uncle, "You're taking the wrong road." "No, I'm not." He's right. He was right, he took the right road back. He took the wrong road. No, he has a good sense of direction. Well he graduated from Michigan State and all that.

DC: You mentioned that your son went to St. Mike's. Was the church a part of your lives?

AA: Oh yeah. St. Mike's—that's where he went to school, at St. Michael's. And after, he went to Pontiac Catholic, which is Notre Dame there now.

DC: Had the church been an important part of your life when you were growing up?

AA: Oh yeah. The church always has been a part of my life.

DC: OK, yeah. What sorts of—oh, go ahead.

AA: Back East I was St. Mary's, St. Catherine's, and that's where I got married, in St. Mary's. Then after we came out here we belonged to St. Vincent's, because we lived in the apartment behind St. Vincent's church. We used to go there, and I got to know, like, the Monsignor and all them others pretty good. And after all we went to St. Mike's, and later on we went to St. Joseph's down the south end of town.

DC: What made you decide to move to Saint Joseph's?

AA: Well, my wife is of Polish extraction. You know, she's Polish. And she—her aunts and all that, they all belonged down there. So that's the only reason why. And my son loved it down there, too. But after awhile when they were building Pontiac Catholic, they asked for donations, you know, just for building, so we gave five hundred dollars to help build it at that time. That was a lot of money at that time.

DC: That's a lot of money. Yeah. So your wife is Polish then?

AA: Yeah, she's of Polish extraction. I always say I'm just a borderline case. Lithuanian-Pole, you know, right on the border.

DC: The border, that's right. Well were you involved in any of the Polish clubs around town or anything like that? I've talked to some people who were of Polish descent and they said that there were quite a lot of Polish parties and picnics.

AA: No, we went to a lot of parties but we didn't belong to any organization or anything. In fact, I don't think there was an organization.

DC: It might have been informal, but I guess there were picnics and stuff, yeah.

AA: Yeah, there were pic—you know, years ago we went out to, I forget the name of the park, Pennsylvania Day. I went out there, and you'd be surprised the number of people I knew that were out from Wilkes-Barre area and all that, from around there.

DC: They had Pennsylvania Day around here for people who were from Pennsylvania?

AA: Well, at that time. I haven't seen any lately. But at that time they had a Pennsylvania Day out there. I bet there was five thousand people out there. And I got to meet a lot of people I knew and a lot of strangers I met and all that, which was nice.

DC: Yeah, it sounds really nice.

AA: Yeah, I enjoyed the picnic and all that.

DC: Let's see. Were there many Lithuanians or people of Lithuanian descent around?

AA: Oh yeah, there's some that I knew and all that. They were from—lived in Hamtramck, though. That was the Polish neighborhood, but there were some Lithuanians that I knew down there. That's one thing I enjoyed—the first time I went to Hamtramck. I went in, the clerks would talk in Polish and all that. I didn't understand what they—my wife said she understood it and after all she had explained, he—I don't understand Polish, so they talked to you in English. But like I said, that was interesting. That was something that, I don't know, always stood with me and all that. Years ago. But now you go down there and some still talk Polish and all that, but there's a lot of different ethnic groups there now. A lot of Albanians and there's a lot of Afro-Americans down there now. But I go down there once every couple of months. I go down there to buy Polish foods and all that.

DC: Down in Hamtramck?

AA: Yeah. But otherwise, life has been good. Let's put it that way.

DC: Sounds good, yeah. OK. There was a—did you ever have any other layoffs at all after that one day layoff between your job at nickel plate and . . .

AA: No, I never was laid off. The only time I was off, was when they were on strike. Because I would—we used to go picketing and all that.

DC: Do you remember any of those strikes?

AA: I wasn't—let's see. I was in *all* of them, though. But I can't remember the years, though. I don't know—that one time we went down to the GM building in Detroit and all, picketing down there. And boy, that was a hot one. It was warm and all that. So my buddy and I, we came back—we were supposed to get something to eat. We didn't get nothing to eat. I said, "What the heck." We went home to eat.

DC: Do you remember what any of those issues were about, the strike issues? Do you remember what any of those were about?

AA: I think it was wages and working conditions, I think, most of the time. And also some of the things that Walter Reuther and all that—that they proposed, like health benefits and all the other benefits, which is good. I'm glad I—I'm glad they got the benefits. I know when my son was at the court and all that, they had a—their contract was up and all that, so they was talking about raises. Now he said, "Now listen. Get the health benefits." And instead of getting the raise, they got the health benefits, which is a good deal, at the county. If you look at what the heck it costs and all that—health benefits. And his first wife died of cancer. And I used to go down to Ann Arbor every Thursday for about a year and a half, two years. She'd get the treatments down there.

DC: So it sounds like the health benefits came in handy there, too.

AA: I still believe health benefits are the best thing the union has and all that. Because you never know when you're gonna use it. And because you know what it is to go to a doctor's now, like for surgery? I know my brother, he just had the four bypasses and all that. He showed me a bill: sixty-six thousand dollars, and I think he paid only twenty-eight dollars or something. Which is, look at a lifetime! Would you be able to afford that without any benefits?

DC: No, not at all.

AA: No, but that's one thing I gotta say: the benefits are always the best. Money is, well it helps some, but still, no, I think the benefits are better.

DC: Well back in the '50s when, let's see, your first son was born—or your son was born in '54. Did you have other children, or just the one?

AA: No, he was the only one. We're thankful that we had one.

DC: Yeah, in '54. And your wife stopped working at Truck and Coach then.

AA: Yeah.

DC: How was your family getting by? You mentioned that . . .

AA: Well I was working and all that. We survived. We bought a home and all that, the following year.

DC: So where were you living before you bought that house?

AA: I lived in an apartment over in the south end—yeah I guess you'd say it's the south end of town. I had a—lived in an apartment there for—let's see—yeah, I lived there for, oh, let's see, about six years. Maybe seven.

DC: OK. And then you were able to buy a home?

AA: Yeah, on the GI loan. I bought—we bought a home on the GI loan.

DC: Was that before or after your son was born?

AA: After my son was born.

DC: After, OK. All right. So you bought the house, and where was the house?

AA: On Madison Street, where I live now.

DC: Where you live right now.

AA: Yup. I didn't move or anything. I'm still there.

DC: Yeah. All right. OK. So the GI loan helped you out there. How about your wages from your job and all? How comfortable was your family living at that point in time?

AA: Well we always lived comfortable. We always managed. That's the only thing I can say: we managed. I was the only one working at that time—and after, when my son started school, then she started working. So we did fairly . . .

DC: That's when she went back into the school system?

AA: Yeah. So we did fairly good. But we always managed, that's all I'll say. You could always manage.

DC: So it sounds like you did more than manage in some ways because you were traveling all around the country, as well.

AA: Yeah. Well, at that time—when the plant would shut down, you know, for the changeover, that's when we started traveling.

DC: OK. You'd have several weeks, then, to travel.

AA: Yeah.

DC: Would other families do the same sort of thing?

AA: Well I imagine some did and all that. But some didn't.

DC: OK.

AA: But we used to take about five trips to Pennsylvania every year. Our parents were living there. But in fact, my Mother was living and her parents were living. Her Dad was a policeman in Pennsylvania. That's why he never came out here. He was the only one that didn't come out. He was a policeman and that was it.

DC: Did your Mother stay?

AA: My Mother, she died in Pennsylvania. She died in '68. My sister was living with her, and her husband. So they managed pretty good. And my other brother, he was up in Binghamton, New York at that time.

DC: OK. Well let's talk a bit more about that inspector's job then. Maybe there's nothing more to say, but we'll search a little bit for it. What was your sense of, um—I'm trying to think back to when you first got the job, which would be the late '40s and on in the '50s, in that era. OK? What was the—how many cars needed repair work? What was the quality like

back then?

AA: Well, the quality—some of them supervisors, they were nitpicking all the time. I don't know why, but they'd—see, like some of them didn't want the cars to get out there. But still, everything was OK. I believed in inspecting the safety items, and that was the most important part. But a lot of these little fuzzy stuff, I know the dealer would get it and all that.

DC: What kind of fuzzy stuff?

AA: Beg your pardon?

DC: You said the little stuff, the fuzzy stuff . . .

AA: Yeah, little stuff, like, like a scratch or something like that. Well they had to go to Plant 16. They inspected over there, but I never knocked any of that stuff down or anything. The only thing I was concerned, mostly, was the safety items.

DC: Such as?

AA: Like the brakes and all that, and the drive and all that.

DC: OK. And how would you test the brakes and all that?

AA: If they're wrote up and all that. Then I'd go check the cars and see that they're in neutral and all that. Sometimes you get cars that are—start in neutral. I know this one supervisor says—he always—I don't know, he always got on me. He was all right, outside of the shop, but inside—he said, "There's nothing wrong with it." I said, "It's taking off in neutral." And he said, "I don't believe it." So he got in the car, he started it, and took it right out. Shut it off. Didn't say a word to me after that. And sometimes the cars would take off and instead of going in reverse they'd go forward and all that. With the gear shifts and all. Well they had to reset them and all that.

DC: Now were you inspecting them after they had been repaired, or were you inspecting them right off the line?

AA: Well, I was inspecting them when they were repairing them on the line.

DC: OK, repairing them on the line.

AA: And after all, if there's something that didn't go right, they had certain bays in the shop where they had to take, like mechanical stuff. They'd take them in the different bays in the shop, and they had fellows working on it in the bays there.

DC: And would you inspect them again when they came out of those bays?

AA: No, I just inspected them on the line.

DC: Were there other inspectors who inspected . . .

AA: Yeah, there was others. There was a lot of inspectors. And we'd get to get overtime and all that. Then you'd work in the back, because they would have the line running. You'd go outside or else in the bays.

DC: Oh, to try to get them off the line and keep the other ones moving through.

AA: Yeah.

DC: Yeah. Well what percentage of cars had problems coming down the line?

AA: Oh, well at that time it seemed like some of the inspectors would, if there was a screw or something missing and all, they'd write that up. And you could check, like the screws or things like that, like tears in the headlines or seat cushions or something like that. Then you'd knock them down, then you'd have to put them into a different bay and all that to put the new seat in or else put the—well the screws in—all the minor repairs, you could get them on the line when we were inspecting. But some of the heavier repairs, you'd put them in different bays and all that.

DC: So it sounds like it depended a little bit on how picky you wanted to be.

AA: Yeah. But mostly I believed in the safety items.

DC: How about other inspectors? Were they just as concerned about safety, do you think?

AA: Oh yeah. I think most of them were concerned about safety. Because I think that is one of the basic things of safety items on a car and all that.

DC: Well what did you like best about that job?

AA: Well it wasn't hard. Let's put it that way. It was—it kept you busy, but still it wasn't hard work, where you didn't have to break your back or anything like that.

DC: Was that job in high demand? In other words, I'm a little surprised that someone didn't bump you off that job since you didn't have much seniority.

AA: Yeah, but every year I got more seniority every year and all that. And after all, they had a line there—I used to write up, like, repairs and all that. That was first, writing up, and after that I was OK and after that, later on.

DC: OK. Well what did you like least about that job?

AA: [pauses] I think the [pauses] oh, I think some of the things that you'd write up and all that,

you'd work down the line and after I had to hurry up to get back up on the line where your station was and all that. That was it. It kept you busy. But as a whole, it was pretty good, though. The only thing I didn't like was they increased production and all that. Then you'd be working a little faster and all that.

DC: So more cars would still be coming through but you'd still be responsible for the . . .

AA: That's right. They had quite a bit of inspectors, let's see, that's one, two, three—they had three inspectors on one side, three on the other side. If you missed something, the one down below would get it and all that. So as a whole it was—it was pretty good. But that's the hard time, was when they'd boost production and all that. You had to get adjusted because you were—you were at a certain pace before that, but when they adjusted production, then you had to speed up a little more.

DC: OK. Yeah. Did the job change at all in other ways? It changed when they changed the production speed, but were there other changes over time in how that job went? How many years did you do that job?

AA: [pauses] Twenty-seven.

DC: So in that twenty-seven years, can you talk about changes that . . .

AA: Yeah, there were a lot of changes. Before I left they put a, like a computer system, which they had the repairs to do and all that. And you checked—and after all, what was on the computer, you just bought whatever was OK'd—the other stuff, you just leave it go by. They'd go somewhere else, to the bays and all that, to work on. But that's the first time I had the computers. I don't know. I just read them and that was it. It had nothing to do with any like that. Somebody up the line was doing that. I don't know.

DC: When did the computers get introduced to the cars, do you know?

AA: Let's see, I got out in—let's see, '75. Oh, about, '73, I guess.

DC: OK, about then. So just the last couple years that you were working there.

AA: Yeah, the last couple years that I was working there, that's when they came out. About '73, '74, something like that.

DC: OK. So that was a big change when the computers came.

AA: Yeah. When the computers—then they had by numbers—certain numbers, you know, they had certain on the ticket. The computer would print out which one was—had to be repaired and all that. The inspector, I guess, would check them out and all—time to come down to the line.

DC: Did the computer replace any of the inspectors?

AA: No. Not then. I don't know about now.

DC: OK, but not then.

AA: Not then. Didn't replace any of us. The only thing, it made it a little easier for some of the inspectors to read and buy off OK and all that—OK jobs.

DC: So it actually helped the inspectors do the job.

AA: Yeah.

DC: OK. Well that's interesting. Let's see. What kinds of people were you working with as inspectors? Who else . . .

AA: Well I had a couple of committeemen working with me. They worked on the line, but they'd be called off for, like a grievance or something. Then somebody else would replace them.

DC: Were they mostly your age or were they younger, or older?

AA: I think they were about mostly my age, because let's see. . . Oldzak [sp?], Wilkerson [sp?], they were all my age.

DC: When you started out.

AA: Yeah. They were about my age because I've known them, oh, for years and all. I remember all of my—I remember I got along with them pretty good.

DC: OK. Did you ever help each other out?

AA: Oh yeah. You'd cover up for one another. If they want to go somewhere, they'd cover up on it.

DC: OK. And how did that work?

AA: It worked OK. Because you didn't—they wouldn't be gone long. They'd go to the can or something. Instead of a relief man come, they had to hurry to go—"we'll cover you up." So they'd go and you'd help do their job, because you could cover up quite a bit of the work.

DC: OK. Let's see. I'm trying to think. Were there any women who were inspectors?

AA: Yes, there was. There was a few of them. Goldie was one—and a lot of them used to check up on the trim and all that. They'd check out, like, buying off and all that. Some of them were pretty good at it.

DC: What were the working relations like between the men and the women?

AA: Well, I imagine they were good because—actually, I never worked with a woman, like on inspect, but we had them and they had a pretty good relation, I think, the woman. They usually checked, like the trim and like the door glasses and the inside and things like that. But—jeez, the ones I know and all that, I remember them, some of the work that they done. They inspected a lot of the trim and the inside of the car and some of the dash work and all that. But as a whole and all that, that's about all. They didn't do any real heavy work or anything like that.

DC: Were there any inspectors who were black?

AA: Yeah, I worked with one, two, three of them. And they were pretty good. I know a couple of them got to be supervisors. And after all I'll ask him about a certain thing—he said, "Al," he said, "You were on this job longer than I. You know more about it than I do." I said, "OK, that's all I want to know." They never bothered you because they understood that you were on the job that long, that you knew most of the jobs and all that.

DC: It sounds like that supervisor came up from the ranks then.

AA: Yeah, he came up. They all came up from the ranks.

DC: OK. Were there any black inspectors when you first got that job?

AA: Yeah, we had a couple in there. In fact, they're the ones who went up on the ranks.

DC: They're the ones who rose, OK.

AA: They were there for, oh, I imagine twenty-some years before they went up in the ranks. But otherwise, they were pretty good.

DC: Well in general, what were race relations like inside the plant?

AA: To me, they were good. I mean, the blacks that I were involved with, they were all pretty good. And after they had the riots in Detroit and all that and some of the blacks that lived down that way, they had to get there, and they said the helicopter used to follow them all the way to the house and all that. But as a whole, we got along real good. In fact, even, like busing and all that, I don't know—certain blacks are for it and some are not. But, like my neighbor and all that, during the riots and all, he was a Marine and all that. He was a painter on the outside. But still, he'd come out with a gun. I said, "What the heck are you doing with that gun?" He said, "I'm going down . . . " I said, "Jack, you're drunk. Put the gun away," and all that. Finally he put it away. I had no reason—in fact, I didn't even have a gun in the house. Because after I got out of the service, I went down to New York visiting, and my cousin took me out hunting. And the guy was gonna shoot me right there. What the hell they gonna shoot? He said, "I thought you were a deer." I said, when I seen

that, I said, "I quit." That's when I gave up hunting. And my brother-in-laws and all that, they all believe in hunting and all that. In fact, one of my brother-in-laws used to go fishing at Ted Williams's up in New Brunswick. [Ted Williams did fish frequently in that area.] He felt pretty bad when he passed away and all that. Because he used to call him up. And one day, my wife and I were visiting him back there and a phone call came—he said, "This is the captain talking." My wife went, "Who the hell's the captain?" Here it was Ted Williams. He wanted my brother to go fishing up in Labrador somewhere, I forget where. They went fishing all over.

DC: So how did they meet?

AA: I don't know. I think they met [pauses] at a—I think they met in New York. He was getting on a plane going to, fishing. I think they met in New York. I'm not sure, though. But they became fairly good friends and all that.

DC: It sounds like your brother liked to fish.

AA: Oh yeah. That's all they do is fish anymore.

DC: Did you like to fish?

AA: Me? Nope. My uncle took me fishing, over in the hot sun in the Pocono Mountains. Every time I went I got such a headache. I said, I'm not going, every time he took me I got a terrific headache. But otherwise—I love baseball, though. I love the game.

DC: Do you still follow it? Do you still follow baseball?

AA: No, I don't follow now because they're not playing baseball now. They're playing money. That's what it is. In fact, I don't think they're—some of them players are as good as when they were when Ted Williams, Babe Ruth, and all, Lou Gehrig and all played and all that. These players now, that's all it is, is money.

DC: They do make a lot of money.

AA: But—I don't know if I can say it.

DC: You can say whatever you want.

AA: They're just scratching their crotch and all that and doing this and that. I said, "Hell, that's not baseball." And jeez, they swing at some bad pitches and all that. In fact, just like—they haven't got the pitching now because them people are hitting all them home runs. There's not the pitching there. Jeez, anybody in minor leagues could get up there and pitch and all that. They'd give up all them home runs, and the ball is livelier I think.

DC: You think so? Huh. Were there any baseball teams at Pontiac Motors?

AA: No, I don't think so. I know General Motors—I knew the Truck and Coach, they had baseball.

DC: Truck and Coach did. OK.

AA: Yeah, because—I know Pat Glen. He was the mayor. I think he was the mayor of Pontiac then. He was the coach over there. Or he was a councilman, I forget what. But he was the—we played them. We had a team on the side that played only on Sundays or Saturdays. So we played them a couple times. There were a lot of good ball players there.

DC: So it sounds like there wasn't necessarily a Pontiac Motors team or something.

AA: No. In fact, we used to play the Mexicans all the time.

DC: Did you? What was that like?

AA: Oh, for a case of beer or something, half a beer and all. That was just a get-together and all. I got along with the Mexicans real good.

DC: So you had fun?

AA: Oh yeah, had a lot of fun. But we never played any of the black teams. But when I played ball in Wilkes-Barre and all that, we did play black teams back there.

DC: OK. In Wilkes-Barre?

AA: Yeah. They had the Wilkes-Barre Giants and all that. They had good ball players.

DC: OK. Were there a lot of blacks in Wilkes-Barre?

AA: At that time, I can't say. Probably a few thousand and all that, but now there's quite a bit back there. Because when they built this prison that's outside of Wilkes-Barre, a lot of the prisoners, their parents, their friends or wives would come up to Wilkes-Barre to live there now, to see their spouses or whoever's in jail and all that. They'd come up from Philadelphia or anyplace and all that. They settle there. But there's quite a bit back there.

DC: When you used to play the Mexicans here in Pontiac in baseball, who was on *your* team?

AA: Oh, my brother, all these—it's around the neighborhood, a lot of the fellows around the neighborhood played. And there's Jim Eagleman [sp?]. And it used to be the guys that used to be at the bar and all that. They'd be drinking and all that, but somehow when they played ball they were all sober. But they were pretty good athletes.

DC: What position did you like to play?

AA: Well, I played the outfield. But every once I'd play the infield. But I liked the outfield.

That's when I had a chance to go down to Batavia, I played the outfield when I was back east and all that.

DC: So it sounds like you had a good time. What prompted you to retire?

AA: I had to go out on disability. I had a disc, you know, herniated disc I had—a year later I had another one. And that was when I got out of the shop. And after all they did a rhizotomy on my leg and all, they deadened the nerve going down to my knee and all that. I don't know. My back still bothers me.

DC: It does?

AA: Oh yeah, you have to watch what you do. I don't dare lift too heavy and all that. But like cutting grass and all that, I'm all right.

DC: Would you have wanted to keep on working if you could have?

AA: Oh yeah, until I'd gotten thirty years in. I got twenty-eight year—twenty-seven and plus so many months in. I'd a worked for thirty years. Because it was a good place to work.

DC: What made it a good place to work?

AA: Beg your pardon?

DC: What made it a good place to work?

AA: I mean, the people that you work with, they're friendly and all that. Even, like a lot of the supervisors were nice to you and all that. I know this one—students that used to go up to GM Tech in Flint and all that, the school there, they'd come down there, they'd work for a week or so. And I used to teach a lot of them. And they all became supervisors. This one went down to Kansas City—he's at the head of plant. Another went up to Lansing—no, I didn't teach him. Jim Zupkas [sp?], he was the head of the Pontiac plant—what is that? What did they build up there? The Grand Am. Yeah, he was at the head of that plant. But like I said, they were good and all that. Like I said, I taught them there, they listened to what I had to say and go ahead and inspected their car. And I got along good with them. And they were nice. And they were all young men at that time. And later on if you meet them, they'll talk to you instead of being the big shot or anything. But they respect you.

DC: So it sounds like that was a big part of it, the fairness and the respect. So are there any questions that I should have been asking you that I haven't asked you?

AA: Whatever you want to ask me . . .

DC: Well, I'm trying to think. I've been asking you a lot of questions but I don't know if there are any others that you think I should've been asking.

AA: About in the plant?

DC: Yeah, can you think of questions that I should have asked you that I haven't asked you yet?

AA: [pauses] No, you did a pretty good interview and all that—my brother and all that, and my younger brother and all of my family and all. My brother and I are the only ones left. But like on my Mother's side, my grandfather, they all lived to a ripe old age and all that. I never knew my grandfather. He was ninety-six, and he was in Lithuania. I never knew him.

DC: You never went back to Lithuania.

AA: No.

DC: Yeah. And he never made it over here?

AA: No. He never made it over here. So, the only one is my Dad and my uncle came from—the only thing, he says, "Don't ever trust the Russians." Because he was in the Russian-Jap war and the officers were—they were lousy. They were mean to the soldiers and all that. But I know when I was going in the service, he said, "Don't trust the Russians." That's all he says, which is the truth. I believe it.

DC: OK. Was that—I'm trying to think, you would have been working during the Cold War.

**End of Tape I, Side B**

**Begin Tape II, Side A**

DC: OK.

AA: But they were from Wilkes-Barre. Any time they didn't want me to know anything, both of them would talk in Russian. And after all one day I got out, I said, "What is it you don't want me to hear?" They didn't say nothing. They just kept quiet. Because they'd say something—I don't know if it was against me or about me or about my family or anything like that, because they'd talk in Russian. That's right. And they were friends of mine. And after I got out and all that—I don't know—I lost respect when they'd start talking Russian.

DC: I've seen parents do that to try to keep secrets from kids, but—adults from adults here.

AA: Oh yeah. But I mean, adults and all that—your age and all that—when they start doing—but, you know, I lived in that neighborhood and all that. I was learning certain languages and all that. But somehow, it seemed like the Russians was the hardest ones to get along with. I don't know why. Maybe my uncle was right—don't trust the Russians.

DC: Don't trust the Russians, yeah. I wondered, maybe I can ask for your comparison here. You served in World War II and you would have worked in the plants both during the Korean War and during the Vietnam War.

AA: Yeah.

DC: Yeah. Did you see—or have any feelings about the veterans in those wars and their service and all?

AA: [pauses] Let's see, when the war was over—I know some of the boys that went over there, but I never ran into anybody at work with that was in the Vietnam War. Because when the—in '70-something—wasn't the war over?

DC: Well, in the mid-'60s—and our troops were pretty much out by '73 or so, right around there.

AA: Yeah. Yeah. Because I retired in '76 and all that. They got me out.

DC: But did you remember any of the workers here in Pontiac being drafted to go off to fight in Vietnam?

AA: No, I didn't. There wasn't any that I know that were drafted and all that. Because it seemed like the ones that I knew that went were the younger ones on the outside that weren't working and all that.

DC: OK. How about with the Korean War? Do you remember anyone going to fight in the Korean War?

AA: Oh yeah. My Mexican friend. I was just talking to him yesterday and all that. He said—he was there and in fact, after I came out of the service, Uncle Sam sent me a letter asking me if I'd go enlist again as a tech sergeant and go to the Korean War. And I was married that time. I said, "No," I said, "I don't think I'd want to go." Because World War II was an experience that—I'd like to forget most of it.

DC: Yeah. So you weren't interested in re-upping there.

AA: No. That's true. Because war is hell and all that.

DC: Did you pay any attention to local union politics while you were in the union, like who was running for union president or who was running for committeeman?

AA: No, I was always concerned. I used to vote for the union and all that. But I never tried to run for any union office or anything like that.

DC: But did you pay attention to the issues involved?

AA: Oh yeah.

DC: What kinds of issues came up in the local union?

AA: Like the benefits was one of them, about the raise in pay and all of that. It didn't matter that much—but like you say, when you have a family, you think about the health benefits. And you wanted a raise and all that. But still and all, it gave you some protection, the union did. That's one thing I'll say—the union gives you some protection, which is good. And when the way they're trying to break up the unions, I don't agree with them. The way the stock market's going now, none are union members, I don't think, in there—they're taking a beating.

DC: Yeah. Did you ever pay any attention to what the national UAW was talking about in the 1950s or 1960s?

AA: Yeah, I remember, but—what they were talking about, like Reuther and all that. It was about the working conditions was mostly and, like benefits that you receive and all that. But I still say that benefits was the main thing. And wages. But otherwise, about the issues—well, I guess you'd—of course, a lot of issues you could think about.

DC: Can you remember anything that you were concerned about in the '50s or '60s that the national United Auto Workers was also concerned about? Did you pay any attention to Walter Reuther's positions or things like that?

AA: Well Reuther, I paid attention to him. Because I think he was one of the true leaders. In fact, I think we all had pretty good leadership ever since. But—but as a whole, I still think unions are good. So you a union man or no?

DC: I am, yeah. Yeah, I'm a member of the faculty union over at Oakland University.

AA: Are you?

DC: Yeah.

AA: Were you over to see the President and the Polish [President George W. Bush and the President of Poland, Aleksander Kwasniewski, visited the Oakland University campus on July 18, 2002.] . . .

DC: I was out of town.

AA: I was talking to a woman yesterday, she was there.

DC: What did your wife think of all that?

AA: Well she didn't go. I think it was a good deal. But I don't know about Bush and all. I'm a

little on the fence with him.

DC: What about your political support back in the '50s? Did the local union ever get involved in trying to push for a candidate, like to push for. . .

AA: Oh yeah. They tried to get the Democrats in, and all that, you know that.

DC: Yeah. But I mean did your local work hard at that?

AA: Well they worked pretty—they'd help people out and all that. Because even back East and all that, I remember the first time I voted. I was a day short of being twenty-one. I voted and the Democrats told me I could vote. The next day after I voted, the next day the Republicans was ready to put me in jail because I broke the law.

DC: Is that right?

AA: Yeah. But they got me out of it. They figured it was an honest mistake, which is the truth. I thought I could have voted.

DC: Just a day short, huh?.

AA: Yeah. And elections back East were kind of hectic at that time and all that. Republicans and Democrat, they—I don't know—where they got the money, I don't know. That was at the local level, back then.

DC: OK. At the local level.

AA: Yeah, but—well even like around here at all the local levels and all that. It seemed like the people don't want to go out to vote. That's what gets me. I get teed off at some of them people. They don't vote. My wife and I, we vote almost every election and all that. And they're the ones that complain. Those that don't vote always complain.

DC: Well it sounds like the retiree group has been good for you, as well. Lots of activities.

AA: Well, like I said, I come out here every Thursday—no, once a month. And Bonnie's [Bonnie Melton] a very nice person. I know my granddaughter, she's talking on the phone—she's only two. She says, "Hiya Bonnie." Bonnie said hi. And after all she started reciting Old MacDonald Had a Farm or something. But as a whole, I think Bonnie's doing a good job.

DC: What about your son? What's he doing?

AA: He's working for juvenile court. He's out in Walled Lake, at juvenile court there. And he's over at Walled Lake every once in awhile. They have a room there for—in abuse. Certain children and all that, certain ages and all that. But I guess—he's been with it now twenty-five years.

DC: Yeah, that's good. Well, can you think of other people that I might be able to talk to? I don't know if any—you seem to have contact with a number of people still who worked a long time ago.

AA: Well, I'll ask them if they want to. I'll just have your name and . . .

DC: OK. Let me give you this sheet. I probably gave it to you way back when at the picnic. Oops, that's the wrong one . . . [turns off tape recorder]

**End of Interview**

**From : http://www.geocities.com/naforts/hi.html (3/5/06)**

¤ **Koko Head Military Reservation**

*(unknown dates), near Hawai'i Kai*

Located on Kuamookane Hill was **Koko Head Battery** (1941 - 1942) two pairs of Panama mounts. It was under the command of Fort Ruger, and was later replaced by Battery Wili. At Koko Saddle was to be located **Battery 305** (WWII never built). Fire-control station "H'" (three pre-WWII structures, one WWII structure) was located on Koko Head, as well as an SCR-270 mobile radar (1941). An SCR-271A fixed radar (1942) was located on Koko Crater, with the operations and power rooms tunneled into the rim.

From: http://www.nyc.gov/html/lpc/downloads/pdf/reports/childs.pdf (3/5/06) for information about Childs Restaurant chain

See also Jakle and Scully, Fast Food